

Message Text

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ACTION OES-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-10 CIAE-00 INR-07 IO-11

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-07 NRC-07 FEAE-00 DODE-00

ERDA-07 PA-02 PRS-01 USIA-15 EA-09 HEW-06 NEA-10 /118 W

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R 161927Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8211

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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DEPT PASS ERDA FOR NELSON SIEVERING

BRUSSELS PASS ERDA BRUSSELS

DEPT FOR OES/SCI: M. KRATZER

E.O. 11652: L/A

TAGS: TECH ELRG UK JA

SUBJECT: UK PUBLIC DEBATE ON NUCLEAR FUEL REPROCESSING

1. THE BRITISH NUCLEAR FUEL CORPORATION IS NEGOTIATING WITH A JAPANESE CONSORTIUM, ERG, FOR BNFL TO PROVIDE LONG TERM REPROCESSING SERVICES TO ERG. THE PROPOSED CONTRACT WOULD PROVIDE FOR TRANSPORTATION, STORAGE AND REPROCESSING AT THE BNFL WINDSCALE LABORATORY OF APPROXIMATELY 4000 TONS OF SPENT OXIDE FUEL FROM LWRS IN JAPAN, AT A PRICE IN THE VICINITY OF ONE BILLION DOLLARS. THIS WORK WOULD BE CARRIED OUT IN THE 1980S, IN AS YET TO BE CONSTRUCTED WINDSCALE FACILITIES.

2. THE UK DAILY MIRROR, A LARGE CIRCULATION NEWSPAPER, HAS CRITICIZED BNFL FOR PLANNING TO USE BRITAIN AS A "NUCLEAR DUSTBIN" FOR OTHER COUNTRIES' NUCLEAR WASTES. CONSEQUENTLY, THE UK SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY, MR. A.

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WEDGWOOD BENN, PROPOSED IN PARLIAMENT THAT A PUBLIC DEBATE

WOULD BE ARRANGED TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER. THE DEBATE TOOK PLACE ON JANUARY 15 AT CHURCH HALL WESTMINSTER.

3. THE PLATFORM SPEAKERS WERE CON ALLDAY, CHAIRMAN OF BNFL; PETER MUMMERY, MANAGER OF THE WINDSCALE PLANT; WALT PATTERSON OF FRIENDS OF THE EARTH, AND P. SMOKER OF LANCASTER UNIVERSITY, REPRESENTING HALF-LIFE. IN ADDITION ABOUT 30 SPEAKERS MADE SHORT REMARKS FROM THE AUDIENCE, INCLUDING MPS, TRADES UNION REPRESENTATIVES, CONSERVATIONISTS AND CONCERNED MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC. MR. BENN HIMSELF WAS PRESENT AND MADE SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS REEMPHASIZING HIS DESIRE FOR A GOOD PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE REPROCESSING QUESTION.

4. ALLDAY AND MUMMERY SUMMARIZED THE BNFL CASE FOR TAKING FOREIGN REPROCESSING WORK IN BRITAIN. THEY POINTED OUT THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS ADVANTAGES, JOB CREATION IN A DEPRESSED AREA (CUMBRIA), AND THEIR OPTION TO RETURN THE FUEL TO JAPAN IF REPROCESSING PROVES TO BE IMPRACTICABLE. THEY DWELT ON THE EXTENSIVE HEALTH PRECAUTIONS FOR THE PLANT AND VICINITY AND EMPHASIZED CONTROLS BY THE NUCLEAR INSPECTORATE.

5. OF THE OPPOSITION SPEAKERS, PATTERSON EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT OXIDE REPROCESSING WAS AN UNPROVEN PROCESS. HE EMPHASIZED THE GREAT PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH STORAGE OF HIGH LEVEL WASTE IN THE FUTURE AND FOR SECURE TRANSPORTATION OF PLUTONIUM IN THE PRESENT, PARTICULARLY SINCE ABOUT 40 TONS OF PLUTONIUM WOULD HAVE TO BE SHIPPED BACK TO JAPAN UNDER THE SUBJECT CONTRACT. HE APPEALED TO THE UK GOVERNMENT TO DELAY ITS DECISION UNTIL THE MAY 1976 PUGWASH CONFERENCE AT RACINE, WISCONSIN WHICH WILL DISCUSS REGIONAL REPROCESSING CENTERS.

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6. SMOKER MADE A RATHER CYNICAL PRESENTATION IN WHICH HE SAID THE DEBATE WAS A WASTE OF TIME BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT HAD ALREADY MADE UP ITS MIND TO GO AHEAD AND WAS MERELY GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF GETTING PUBLIC CONSENT. HIS MAIN THEME WAS AN ATTACK ON THE ENTIRE INDUSTRIAL-TECHNOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY WHICH HE BELIEVES IS THE WRONG PATH FOR MANKIND.

7. OTHER SPEAKERS REPRESENTED TRADES UNION AND LOCAL AUTHORITY VIEWS WHICH WERE STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF ALLOWING BNFL TO PROCEED. ONE MAN SAID THAT MORE PEOPLE WOULD BE KILLED BY JAPANESE CARS THAN BY JAPANESE NUCLEAR FUEL.

8. THERE WERE SOME QUESTIONS RAISED ON THE HEALTH RECORD OF WINDSCALE EMPLOYEES AND FAILURE BY THE AEA TO KEEP RECORDS ON WORKERS WHO HAD QUIT. ANDREW MACLANE, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL RADIOLOGICAL PROTECTION BOARD SAID THAT THEY HAD NOW ESTABLISHED A NATIONAL REGISTER OF ALL WORKERS WHO HAD ANY EXPOSURE TO NUCLEAR RADIATION. IN UNCLASSIFIED

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HIS VIEW THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF A HIGHER INCIDENCE OF CANCER IN WINDSCALE EMPLOYEES THAN FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

9. IN THE SUMMING-UP PERIOD PATTERSON APPEALED FOR GREATER ATTENTION IN THE UK TO ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES SUCH AS SOLAR, WIND AND WAVE POWER WHICH WOULD BE FREE FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS OF NUCLEAR POWER.

10. AN OVERALL IMPRESSION OF THE DEBATE WAS THAT THE "ANTI-NUCLEAR" FORCES WERE POORLY ORGANIZED AND MADE A RATHER UNIMPRESSIVE ATTACK ON THE ESTABLISHMENT. THEIR TECHNICAL ARGUMENTS WERE COUNTERED IN A REASONABLE FASHION BY BNFL AND AEA SPEAKERS. IT IS HARD TO AVOID

THE IMPRESSION THAT IF THE SECRETARY OF STATE BASES HIS
DECISION ON THIS PARTICULAR PUBLIC DEBATE, THE CONCLUSION
WILL INEVITABLY BE TO PROCEED WITH THE JAPANESE CONTRACT.
IT IS RELEVANT THAT IN A RECENT VISIT TO IRAN, MR. BENN
ALSO OFFERED UK REPROCESSING SERVICES TO THE SHAH AND
THE IRANIAN AEC.

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